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Google launches Waymo and moves closer to self-driving cars

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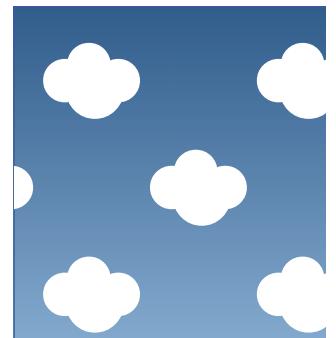
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Google is spinning off its self-driving car program into a separate company called Waymo.

Waymo CEO John Krafcik said Tuesday that its autonomous driving technology has reached an inflection point.

"We're close to bringing this to a lot of people," said Krafcik who declined to reveal when the general public would have a chance to ride in one of Waymo's vehicles.

Google is testing the vehicles in Washington, California, Arizona and Texas.

Waymo is currently a unit of X, the so-called moonshot division of Google ([GOOGL](#), [Tech30](#)). It will become a unit of Alphabet and be an independent company.

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Krafcik said spinning off Waymo would give his team the best of both worlds. Waymo remains part of the Google family, giving it the resources of a large tech company, while also some advantages of a startup.

Related: A self-driving trucks hauls 51,744 cans of beer across Colorado

Google also revealed Tuesday that it gave a blind man the first ride in a fully self-driving vehicle in October 2015. Californian Steve Mahan flew to Austin for the test. It wouldn't have been legal in Google's home state of California.

Austin Mayor Steve Adler described his city as "the Kitty Hawk of driverless cars," a reference to the site of the Wright Brothers first flight.

In October, Uber and Budweiser teamed to deliver a [truckload of beer across Colorado](#). But the truck had a test driver present in the cab and was surrounded by seven vehicles to ensure safety.

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Steve Mahan gets the first ride in a fully self-driving car, without a test driver or police escort, in October 2015. The ride occurred in Austin.

Since Mahan's ride in 2015, Google's vehicles have driven a billion miles in simulation, and a million on public roads in autonomous mode.

Waymo lost a key executive in August when Director Chris Urmson left the program. Krafcik reassured reporters that Google remained focused on delivering fully self-driving vehicles.

"With inspirations like Steve driving us, that's the problem we need to solve. That remains our singular focus," Krafcik said.

He said that some Waymo vehicles, such as its Pacifica minivans, would continue to have a steering wheel and pedals due to regulations.

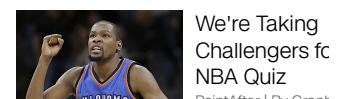
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